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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BISHKEK 000062

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/21/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PRIME MINISTER CLAIMS NO "OFFICIAL  
DISCUSSION" OF BASE CLOSURE, BUT ASKS CENTCOM CDR PETRAEUS  
WHETHER U.S. IS PAYING ENOUGH

REF: BISHKEK 47

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (a), (b), and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: U.S. CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus held separate meetings January 19 with Kyrgyz Minister of Defense Kalyev and Prime Minister Chudinov. In both meetings, Petraeus briefed on the dramatic improvement in the security situation in Iraq, the increase in security incidents in Afghanistan, and the importance of Manas Air Base to Coalition efforts to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan. Chudinov assured Petraeus that there had been no "official discussion" of closing the Base, and he denied any linkage of the issue to a Russian offer of financial assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Chudinov asked, in light of the importance of the Base, whether the U.S. was "paying enough" for access to the Base. Petraeus said he would send a team to Bishkek in February to discuss ways that the Kyrgyz could benefit more from the presence of the Base. While the Kyrgyz appear to have backed away from their position of last week (reftel), they have yet to issue a public statement confirming the base is safe, and we judge the situation stable, but fragile. Absent substantive follow through by February to enhance the economic benefit to the Kyrgyz for hosting the base, the existence of the Base will again be threatened. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) U.S. CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus visited Kyrgyzstan January 17-20 to meet with Kyrgyz Government officials. On January 19, Petraeus met with Minister of Defense Bakytbek Kalyev. Also on January 19, Petraeus met with Prime Minister Chudinov, who was accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Ermek Ibraimov, Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Islan Ryskulov, and Head of the International Department in the Prime Minister's Office Sapar Isakov. Following his official meetings, Petraeus held a press conference attended by representatives of local and international media. Ambassador Gfoeller

accompanied Petraeus to all meetings.

#### Minister of Defense Positive on Relations

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¶3. (C) Minister of Defense Kalyev warmly welcomed General Petraeus and offered a very positive assessment of our military-to-military relationship. Kalyev expressed his appreciation for the U.S. military assistance provided to the MOD, including the NCO Professional Development facility constructed at Koi Tash, the Special Operations facility being constructed at Tok Mok, and the armed forces hospital being constructed at Besh Kungay. Kalyev asked for additional assistance to outfit the hospital, and Petraeus said he would look at the question of additional funding specifically for Besh Kungay. Kalyev also asked for additional assistance to train and equip new peacekeeping units.

¶4. (C) Petraeus provided Kalyev with a detailed briefing on the security situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Using maps and charts, Petraeus explained how the number of security incidents in Iraq declined sharply following the Surge. Petraeus explained that in contrast to the improvement in Iraq, Afghanistan had seen an increase in the number of security incidents and violent deaths in 2008, with 70% of kinetic events occurring in only 10% of the districts, particularly in the east and south. Petraeus said that the United States was committed to help deal with the situation in Afghanistan, and more NATO forces will be going into Afghanistan to fight the extremists. Petraeus said that defeating extremists in Afghanistan was a shared interest of the Central Asian countries, Russia, China, and the United

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States. Petraeus said that Manas Air Base would play an increasingly crucial role as a logistics, transport, and re-fueling hub with Coalition plans to raise troop levels in Afghanistan this year.

¶5. (C) Petraeus said the war in Iraq had taught him many lessons, including that there is a need for comrades to cooperate to achieve common objectives, and trust is the foundation on which success is built. Petraeus said that the new administration would be looking at Central Asia for partners, and one way that Kyrgyzstan could build trust would be to return the weapons seized in August 2008 by Kyrgyz Interior Ministry forces from a U.S. special forces training team.

¶6. (C) Asked by Petraeus about reports that the Kyrgyz Government was considering closing Manas Air Base, Kalyev responded that there was "no truth" to these "rumors." Kalyev claimed that the rumors started in the Russian media and were picked up by other Internet sites.

#### PM Denies "Official Discussion" of Base Closure

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¶7. (C) Prime Minister Chudinov told General Petraeus that there had been "no official decision" and "no official discussion" of terminating the base agreement. Petraeus asked if he could convey this news publicly to the press, and Chudinov said, "Yes." Chudinov then turned to the investigation into the December 2006 shooting of a Kyrgyz truck driver by a Base airman; Petraeus said the U.S. investigation into the shooting had been "re-opened." Chudinov then raised the Yasynov case, a 1999 traffic accident in which a Kyrgyz pedestrian was allegedly hit by a vehicle driven by a U.S. diplomat; Petraeus said the case was not a military issue.

¶8. (C) Petraeus then gave a detailed presentation on the security situation and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which Chudinov appeared to appreciate. After highlighting the strategy that was working in Iraq, Petraeus said that the

United States and the Coalition were committed to stabilizing and rebuilding Afghanistan. Petraeus detailed plans to increase NATO forces, including up to 30,000 additional U.S. troops in 2009. Petraeus emphasized that fighting extremism was in our shared interest, and Manas Air Base played a critical role in the effort in Afghanistan.

¶9. (C) Petraeus turned to the question of U.S. assistance to Kyrgyzstan. He said that the U.S. provides more than \$150 million each year, \$63 million of which was directly connected to Manas Air Base by way of lease payments, fees, and contracts. Petraeus said that the U.S. could do more, and he promised to send a team in February to explore more ways in which Kyrgyzstan could benefit from the presence of the Base.

¶10. (C) Chudinov said he had paid close attention to the briefing and to the importance of Manas Air Base to the effort in Afghanistan. He then asked, "If Manas is so valuable, are you paying enough for it?" and suggested that the U.S. paid more for other bases. Petraeus pointed out that the U.S. does not pay for bases in, for example, Germany, Japan, and Qatar.

¶11. (C) Chudinov then addressed the rumors in the press that the Kyrgyz government was considering closing the Base. Chudinov said that "many people" had been asking questions about the Base and saying that Kyrgyzstan was paying "a heavy price" for the presence of the Base. Petraeus said that if the "price" was political, then he hoped that the party imposing the political price could be persuaded to move

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beyond the Cold War mentality of a zero sum game and recognize that we have mutual interests in a stable Afghanistan.

¶12. (C) Chudinov said, "You don't have to worry" about the Russian aid package. He said that while they were still discussing details of the package with the Russians, the aid was not tied to Manas. He repeated that he hoped for more "economic cooperation" with the U.S., and he said he would appreciate help in selling more Kyrgyz goods -- cement, glass, bottled water -- for reconstruction in Afghanistan.

¶13. (C) On the way out of the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Ibraimov, clearly awed by the General's charisma and forceful briefing, came up to Petraeus and said, "General, if you fight as well as you negotiate, then we in Kyrgyzstan should be afraid."

Standing Room Only at the Press Conference  
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¶14. (SBU) After his official meetings, General Petraeus held a press conference at the AKIpress news agency. Before the standing-room only crowd of more than seventy journalists, the General discussed the results of his meetings and the current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Pointing to the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, General Petraeus described the importance of the contributions of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states in helping U.S. efforts. General Petraeus then described in detail the economic benefits Kyrgyzstan derives from hosting Manas Air Base and promised to send a team of senior officers in February to discuss in concrete ways to increase those economic benefits. Finally, General Petraeus said he had informed the Prime Minister that the investigation into the 2006 shooting incident on Base had been re-opened and that Kyrgyz authorities would be informed of the results.

¶15. (SBU) Responding to questions, General Petraeus directly addressed persistent local rumors that the Kyrgyz Government was soon going to direct Manas Air Base to be closed. He said that this possibility had not been discussed during his meetings. Each government official with whom he had spoken

said that there was no foundation to these reports. Responding to aggressive questioning from an anti-American local paper, the General firmly responded that over 80% of civilian deaths in Afghanistan are caused by extremists, and he pointed out that these same extremists were the ones who attacked Kyrgyzstan in 1999.

¶16. (SBU) Initial press coverage of the visit has been positive, focusing on the promise of increased local economic benefits from the Base. A majority of local reporting has been repeating Petraeus's statement that closing the Base was not a topic of discussion.

Comment  
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¶17. (C) Thanks to the timeliness of this visit, and the skillful diplomacy of General Petraeus, we have once again dodged a bullet aimed at Manas Air Base. For now, the Kyrgyz appear to have walked back from their position of last week, when they told the Ambassador that they were indeed in discussions with Russia over closing Manas Air Base in return for significant economic assistance. However, the Kyrgyz have yet to issue an official statement confirming the Base is not in danger of being closed, and there is speculation in the press that the recent resignation of Foreign Minister Karabayev was due to the latter's refusal to prepare a formal diplomatic note requesting closure of the Base. We judge the situation to be stable but fragile, and we judge that the

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Kyrgyz continue to believe that they have little stake in the Base's existence. General Petraeus' masterful presentations have bought us time -- until February -- to respond to the Kyrgyz with concrete proposals that will directly or indirectly significantly enhance the economic benefit to Kyrgyzstan for hosting the Base. Moving ahead on the shooting investigation will also be important if we are to restore Kyrgyz trust in the relationship. If we are unable to bring to the table in February an economic package that the Kyrgyz consider attractive, the future of the Base will once again come under question.

¶18. (U) General Petraeus has cleared this cable.  
GFOELLER